



Office of the Attorney General
State of Texas

DAN MORALES
ATTORNEY GENERAL

January 16, 1997

Ms. Y. Qiyamah Taylor
Assistant City Attorney
City of Houston
P.O. Box 1562
Houston, Texas 77251-1562

OR97-0090

Dear Ms. Taylor:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 102999.

The City of Houston received a request for a copy of the investigating officer's file concerning a fatality accident. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.108 excepts from disclosure "[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime," and "[a]n internal record or notation of a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that is maintained for internal use in matters relating to law enforcement or prosecution." Gov't Code § 552.108; see *Holmes v. Morales*, 924 S.W.2d 920 (Tex. 1996). We note, however, that information normally found on the front page of an offense report is generally considered public.¹ *Houston Chronicle Publishing Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.--Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976); Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976). We therefore conclude that, except for front page offense report information and the accident report as discussed below, section 552.108 of the Government Code excepts the requested records from required public disclosure. On the other hand, you may choose to release all or part of the information that is not otherwise confidential by law. Gov't Code § 552.007.

¹ The content of the information determines whether it must be released in compliance with *Houston Chronicle*, not its literal location on the first page of an offense report. Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) contains a summary of the types of information deemed public by *Houston Chronicle*.

Included among the documents you seek to withhold is an accident report form that appears to have been completed by a department investigator in accordance with chapter 550 of the Transportation Code. *See* Transp. Code § 550.064 (officer's accident report). The Seventy Fourth Legislature, without reference to the repeal and codification of V.T.C.S. article 6701d,² amended section 47 of article 6701d, V.T.C.S., relating to the disclosure of accident reports. Act of May 27, 1995, 74th Leg., R.S., ch. 894, §1, 1995 Tex. Sess. Law Serv. 4413, 4414. As amended, section 47(b)(1) provides that:

The Department or a law enforcement agency employing a peace officer who made an accident report *is required to release a copy of the report* on request to:

....

(D) a person who provides the Department or the law enforcement agency with two or more of the following:

- (i) the date of the accident;
- (ii) the name of any person involved in the accident; or
- (iii) the specific location of the accident

V.T.C.S. art. 6701d, § 47(b)(1) (emphasis added). Under this provision, a law enforcement agency "is required to release" a copy of an accident report to a person who provides the law enforcement agency with two or more pieces of information specified by the statute. *Id.* In the situation at hand, the requestor has provided the city with the date of the accident, the names of persons involved in the accident, as well as the location of the accident. Thus, you are required to release this information under section 47(b)(1)(D) of article 6701d, V.T.C.S. Although you have raised section 552.108 of the Government Code as an exception to disclosure, the exceptions under chapter 552 do not, as a general rule, apply to information expressly made public by other statutes. Open Records Decision No. 525 (1989) at 3. Consequently, the accident report must be released to the requestor.

² Effective September 1, 1995, article 6701d was repealed and codified as part of the Transportation Code. Act of May 1, 1995, 74th Leg., R.S., ch. 165, § 24, 1995 Tex. Sess. Law Serv. 1025, 1870-71. *See* Trans. Code § 550.065 (release of accident reports). The legislature did not intend a substantive change of the law but merely a recodification of existing law. *Id.* § 25, 1995 Tex. Sess. Law Serv. at 1871. The repeal of a statute by a code does not affect an amendment of the statute by the same legislature which enacted the code and the amendment is preserved and given effect as part of the code provision. Gov't Code § 311.031(c). Thus, the amendment of section 47 of article 6701d, V.T.C.S., in House Bill 391, remains in effect as current law and may be found following section 550.065 of the Transportation Code. *See also* Act of May 27, 1995, 74th Leg., R.S., ch. 894, §1, 1995 Tex. Sess. Law Serv. 4413, 4414.

We are resolving this matter with an informal letter ruling rather than with a published open records decision. This ruling is limited to the particular records at issue under the facts presented to us in this request and should not be relied on as a previous determination regarding any other records. If you have any questions regarding this ruling, please contact our office.

Yours very truly,



Stacy E. Sallee
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

SES/ch

Ref.: ID# 102999

Enclosures: Submitted documents

cc: Ms. Pamela Baker
Paralegal for G. Robert Sonnier
Clark, Thomas & Winters, A P.C.
P.O. Box 1145
Austin, Texas 78701
(w/o enclosures)